

Washington, DC - The Vermont congressional delegation has been assured by the Martin Luther King Foundation that American granite will be used in a monument to the civil rights leader in the nation's capital.

Vermont granite suppliers will be eligible to compete for contracts that will be announced in the near future, according to Harry E. Johnson Sr., the president and chief executive officer of the memorial foundation. The assurance that a majority of the granite will be American came in a conversation with Senator Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) after efforts by the delegation began this fall.

Senators Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), Sanders and Representative Peter Welch (D-Vt.) had contacted the foundation to express concern over reports that the project would be built with Chinese granite.

Sanders said, "It is very good news that Vermont granite companies and Vermont granite workers will have a chance to contribute to this memorial to one of our nation's true heroes. Dr. King spent much of his life fighting for the working people of all colors in our country, it is appropriate that those working men and women provide the majority of granite for this memorial. While we would have preferred to have all the granite for this monument produced locally, today's news is a major step forward from where we were when this issue was first brought to our attention."

Leahy said, "Barre is home to some of the finest granite in the world - fitting for a memorial that will be built for one of our nation's most visionary and courageous figures. He was a catalyst for momentous change that brought America more in line with America's ideals. As the grandson of two Barre-area stone carvers I am especially pleased that Vermont craftspeople and stone will be given due consideration for this important work."

Welch said, "This is a significant step in the right direction. Barre is second to none in producing the finest granite in the world so this is a great opportunity for our state. Our country's memorials should not simply memorialize great heroes and historic events, but reflect who we are as a nation. It is only fitting that local granite is used for a majority of this memorial."

In a September 26, 2007, letter, the delegation wrote to the foundation to express a "strong belief that this great American monument should be built with American products."

The letter also extolled the benefits of Vermont granite. "Barre, Vermont, often referred to as the 'Granite Capital of the World' produces the world's finest granite. Barre granite has been used in some of the most significant monuments and memorials around the country, including the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington. Furthermore, Barre manufacturers provide their employees with excellent wages and ensure the highest safety standards at their facilities."